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ABSTRACT

A survey of library directors and assistant/associate directors at the 19 campuses of California State University (CSU) revealed a number of factors mitigating against the implementation of assessment center programs for the development of academic library managers. Respondents were asked in a questionnaire to describe their attitudes toward assessment centers in terms of: (1) assessment support; (2) number of identifiable potential candidates for assessment centers existing in their own libraries; (3) willingness to serve as an assessor; and (4) definition of job dimensions attributable to a CSU library manager. The data collected from 29 of the 44 questionnaires distributed in January 1987 (66.6% response rate) were analyzed, and it was concluded that philosophic differences in the administrators' views of professional development for librarians, as well as ambivalences about the value of programs intended to promote such development, are a major factor working against the implementation of an assessment center specifically for librarians. Three tables display the analyses of data on the administrators' attitudes toward assessment centers; job dimensions of library managers as rated by the CSU administrators; and a transcript of some of the respondents' comments. (CGD)

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AN ASSESSMENT CENTER FOR LIBRARIANS? What Do Library Managers in the California State University Think?

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Abstract

Although they have long been popular in the private sector, assessment center techniques are only now being tested in academic library environments. A survey of library managers in a large state-supported system revealed attitudinal and other factors mitigating against implementation of assessment center programs for the development of academic library managers.

What kinds of programs does your campus and your library make available to you for your professional development? Many librarians working at the nineteen campuses of the California State University (CSU) have benefitted from a fee waiver program for courses taken at the University, training in word processing or specific online searching systems or data bases. But librarians in some other academic libraries, including the libraries of the University of California (UC), are being given an opportunity that goes beyond these now fairly routine offerings, an opportunity to participate in a program which helps each person to develop a realistic long range career plan and to know the steps that will help to achieve it. These libraries are offering their professionals access to an assessment center. An assessment center is a process or technique (not a place) in which participants complete a series of exercises which simulate the actual duties and responsibilities of a management position,

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such as Assistant or Associate Director of the Library. Individually and in groups those who are assessed are challenged by these exercises, over a 1-3 day period, to exhibit dimensions, or sets of behavioral characteristics, previously identified as representative of and important for success in the position. Exercises may include an oral presentation on an assigned topic, a leaderless group discussion, an in-basket simulation, and mock disciplinary or problem patron interviews. Up to three participants are observed, as they role play, by a trained assessor, who is responsible for recording and evaluating the behavior observed. In a subsequent feedback session participants discuss with the assessors their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the job dimensions as well as their own actions which showed or did not show these dimensions during the exercises. The assessment center is prescriptive also; participants are provided with advice about specific developmental activities which could help them to complement and round out the managerial strengths shown during the program. Some organizations, including many public libraries, use assessment centers to rate candidates for promotion or selection rather than for development, and this has been a common application of the technique in private industry.

CSU Librarians and Assessment Centers

What are the prospects for a CSU assessment center program, designed by and available to librarians? How do current CSU library managers view the future utilization of Assistant and

Associate Director positions within the system? How many potential candidates do they see in their own libraries for an assessment center--upwardly mobile librarians and/or those interested in learning more about their own aptitudes for career planning purposes? Would they themselves be willing to serve on an assessor panel? What are the job dimensions they would ascribe to a CSU library manager?

To gain answers to these questions the author distributed a questionnaire in January, 1987 to forty-four CSU library directors and assistant/associate directors. This survey asked each respondent to into indicate the degree of interest and support which he/she would assign to the introduction of an assessment center program for CSU librarians, and to consider the related questions outlined above. The survey also reproduced a list of fourteen job dimensions and definitions identified as crucial for success in library management positions in another librarian assessment center program, the Career Development and Assessment Center for Librarians (CDACL) operated by the University of Washington School of Librarianship.* CSU managers were asked to rate these dimensions according to their importance in their own positions: primary importance, secondary importance, or not important. They also were invited to propose additional dimensions not found in the CDACL list.

Twenty-nine responses (two-thirds of those distributed) were received. Not all respondents completed all questions. Results

* CDACL dimensions and their definitions are detailed in "Should Librarians Be Managers?" by Peter Hiatt in Journal of Library Administration, vol. 4 (Spring, 1983), pp. 31-39.

are shown on the following tables. To preserve anonymity each responding CSU library was assigned a letter code; multiple responses from different administrators in the same library are shown by an additional numeral. On some questions, such as the number of librarians who might want to apply for assessment if a program were to be introduced, some managers indicated a range; this is reflected in the tables by a decimal (2-3 librarians = 2.5). These estimates sometimes varied widely among administrators in the same library, but when they are averaged it would appear that the total pool of potential candidates would exceed seventy systemwide. Please refer to tables 1 and 2.

Table 3 shows the written comments provided by CSU library directors and their deputies. They reveal philisophic differences in their view of librarian professional development and in the value of programs intended to promote it. This ambivalence surely is a major factor working against the implementation of any systemwide assessment center for development of librarians.

An Idea Whose Time Has Come

Eighty-nine librarians in the pacific northwest have completed the CDACL. The University of California's Management Skills Assessment Program has operated four times a year since 1980. Since its inception scores of UC librarians have participated in the program as assessees, and others have served as assessors and trainers of assessors. These assessment centers have set precedents, and their success in contributing to

librarian development has been acknowledged. Assessment centers can give focus and direction to existing professional development programs by providing clear indicators of a library's overall developmental needs. Has the time come for CSU administrators to emulate and build upon the UC or CDACL model, to provide new developmental opportunities for CSU librarians?

Table 1
Attitudes Toward Assessment Centers
Reported by Library Managers
of the California State University

CSU Library (code)	Assessment Support (1=high)	Potential Candidates	Future Utilization Asst. Dir.	Future Utilization Assoc.Dir.	Increase in Non-Libr. Managers?	Willing to Serve as Assessor?	Class of Respond.
A1	2.0	4.0	SAME	SAME	NO	YES	ASST. DIR.
A2	1.0	10.0	INCREASE	DECREASE	NO	YES	ASST. DIR.
A3	2.0	6.0	SAME	SAME	NO	NO	ASST. DIR.
B2	2.0	5.0	SAME	DECREASE	POSSIBLY	PERHAPS	DIRECTOR
C	1.0	9.0	INCREASE	INCREASE	YES	YES	DIRECTOR
D	3.0	2.0	SAME	SAME	NO	NO	DIRECTOR
E1	5.0	2.5			YES	NO	ASST. DIR.
E2	5.0	0.0					DIRECTOR
E3	3.0	4.0	SAME	DECREASE	POSSIBLY	PERHAPS	ASST. DIR.
F1	3.0	4.0	SAME	SAME	YES	YES	DIRECTOR
F2	5.0	0.0	SAME	SAME	POSSIBLY	PERHAPS	ASSOC.DIR.
F3	1.0	4.0	SAME	SAME	YES	YES	ASSOC.DIR.
G1	4.0	7.5	SAME	SAME	NO	NO	DIRECTOR
G2	2.0	10.0	SAME	INCREASE	NO	YES	ASST. DIR.
H	2.5	1.5	INCREASE	DECREASE	POSSIBLY	PERHAPS	ASSOC.DIR.
I	3.0	5.5	SAME	SAME	POSSIBLY	YES	ASST. DIR.
J1	1.0	6.5	SAME	SAME	NO	YES	ASST. DIR.
J2	2.0	3.5	SAME	SAME	NO	NO	ASST. DIR.
K1	2.0	13.5	SAME	SAME	NO	PERHAPS	ASST. DIR.
K2	2.0	3.0	SAME	SAME	POSSIBLY	YES	DIRECTOR
L	3.0	2.5	INCREASE	SAME	NO	PERHAPS	DIRECTOR
M1	2.0	2.0	SAME	SAME	NO	YES	ASST. DIR.
M2	2.0	2.5	SAME	SAME	POSSIBLY	YES	DIRECTOR
M3	3.0	3.0	INCREASE	DECREASE	NO	PERHAPS	ASST. DIR.
N	2.0	2.0	INCREASE	INCREASE	POSSIBLY	PERHAPS	DIRECTOR
O	3.0	2.0	SAME	SAME	YES	NO	DIRECTOR
B1	2.0	4.0	SAME	SAME	NO	NO	ASST. DIR.
G3	3.0	6.0	SAME	INCREASE	NO	NO	ASSOC.DIR.
J3	1.0	10.0	SAME	INCREASE	YES	YES	DIRECTOR

Table 2
Job Dimensions of Library Managers
Identified by the CDACL
Rated by CSU Library Managers

Job Dimension (Cluster of behaviors which can be observed and evaluated)	CSU Managers Ranking as Primary Importance	CSU Managers Ranking as Secondary Importance
LISTENING	26.0	2.0
ORAL COMMUNICATION	26.0	2.0
SENSITIVITY	23.0	5.0
WRITTEN COMMUNICATION SKILLS	26.0	2.0
DECISIVENESS	25.0	3.0
DELEGATION	26.0	2.0
FLEXIBILITY	23.0	5.0
INITIATIVE	21.0	7.0
JUDGMENT (DECISION MAKING)	28.0	0.0
LEADERSHIP	26.0	2.0
MANAGEMENT CONTROL	19.0	9.0
PLANNING AND ORGANIZING	24.5	3.5
PROBLEM ANALYSIS/SOLVING	24.0	4.0
TOLERANCE FOR STRESS	22.5	4.5

Additional Dimensions
Proposed by Responding CSU Library Managers:

"Confidence without being dogmatic; an element of humility."

"Belief in and understanding of academic libraries and institutions."

"Sense of humor (3 respondents)--ability to perceive the ridiculous."

"Unconflicted about being an administrator."

"Ability to be proactive, plan for developing long-range goals."

Table 3

Respondent Comments

"The idea of assessment centers for librarians certainly did not catch on--is there an inherent difference between libraries and places in which there are successful applications?"

"A great man once said 'either you got it or you ain't'"

"I would be more comfortable [in dimension ratings] with a category between primary and secondary importance"

"The basic idea that you advance has merit. My interest, however, is lukewarm because of the importance I attach to national searches for management positions. I want to see diversity of experience on a staff. Therefore I don't think it particularly worthwhile to invest much time and effort developing talent (management) on the local level. Our talented locals should, likewise, be moving about in the library world to develop their skills."

"Librarians might want to apply for assessment, but not all who want to apply should attend."

"I can't help but feel that an assessment center is a luxury we cannot afford. Throughout the CSU libraries we have precious little resources, both fiscal and personnel, to fulfill our primary missions. I can think of many other programs which would be of greater eventual value to the CSU--its faculty, staff, and students--than this one. I've been in the CSU system for 13 years. I've seen bright capable librarians rise through the ranks to Asst. Univ. Librs. and Univ. Libs. I believe such people would do so with or without assessment centers. Let's put our money and time where it will do the greatest good for our clientele!

"Certainly this is not a stand alone assessment technique. When used in conjunction with other, more traditional components (i.e. interviews and in-house evaluations) it would be very effective."

"All [dimensions] are important and can be critical in many situations. I wanted to list all as primary but decided not to."

"Each dimension is extremely global, defined by multiple factors or ideas; the instrument needs to be more specific."

"The biggest problem I see is generating a large group of hopeful people when there are very few management positions."